

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SD Delegation Fights for Clean Drinking Water on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation

Washington, DC –South Dakota's Congressional Delegation, U.S. Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD) and John Thune (R-SD) and Representative Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) have joined together to call upon the Army Corp of Engineers to maintain their active involvement on Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's emergency drought situation and ensure that the Tribe does not lose access to drinking water this summer.

Further, the delegation requested that any funds needed to address the situation come from the Corps' Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response, and not pulled away from funds already dedicated to other state projects.

"Undoubtedly you understand that because of the seriousness of the drought, as well as the Corps of Engineers statutory responsibility to manage the Missouri River, our constituents expect that the Corps will take all necessary actions to provide for uninterrupted water service....," the delegation said in a letter to the Army Corp of Engineers.

The Corps of Engineers is working with the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Tri County Rural Water System, the Indian Health Service, and the state of South Dakota to develop a plan to ensure water service in north-central South Dakota. The Corps has pledged to the South Dakota delegation that the plan will be finished by April 18, 2005. A team of analysts from the Corps of Engineers Omaha, Nebraska District Office will complete the plan, which then must be approved by Corps' Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Earlier this month, John Paul Woodley Jr., Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary, Corps of Engineers, pledged to both Senators Johnson and Thune to ensure that the Mni Waste water intake at Eagle Butte, South Dakota will remain operable through anticipated record-low water levels this summer. Mr. Woodley committed to fully implement the joint tribal-Corps plan to extend the Mni Waste intake.

The Corps of Engineers Monthly Water Management Report pegged March 2005 water runoff at 21 percent of normal with mountain snow pack running well below normal. The continued drought conditions project a forecasted annual runoff of only 16.7 million acre feet, roughly 66 percent of normal. The combination of continued drought and the Corps' management responsibilities on the Missouri River will result in lowering the Oahe Reservoir to an estimated elevation of 1564.1 feet by August 2005. In June 2004, an Indian Health Service evaluation determined that the Mni Waste' intake at Eagle Butte, South Dakota required a minimum water level of 1563 before intake failure becomes a serious threat. Currently, seventeen communities and approximately 14,000 people receive drinking water from the Eagle Butte water intake.

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